

Like other minorities, American Indians in North Carolina, face a multitude of social and health issues. In North Carolina, as across the United States, American Indians have a shorter life expectancy than the population as a whole. They are more likely to have inadequate health care, poor nutrition, high infant and adult mortality rates, high adolescent pregnancy rates, and high incidences of living in sub-standard housing. Compared to African Americans and Whites, the state's American Indians also have higher death rates from diabetes and motor vehicle injuries.²

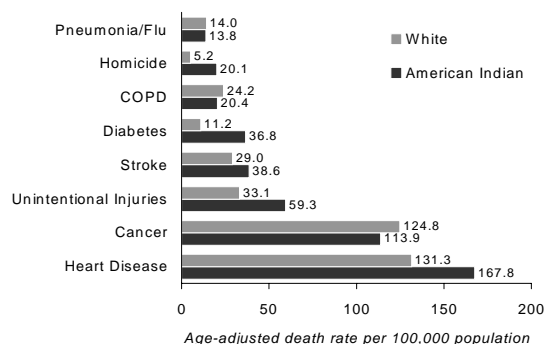
Leading Causes of Death for American Indian Females, 1995-97

| | Number | % of A.I. Female Deaths |
|--------------------------|--------|-------------------------|
| ■ Heart Disease | 235 | 31.3% |
| ■ Cancer | 125 | 16.7% |
| ■ Stroke | 56 | 7.5% |
| ■ Diabetes | 55 | 7.3% |
| ■ Unintentional Injuries | 46 | 6.1% |
| ■ Pneumonia, Influenza | 25 | 3.3% |
| ■ Lung disease (COPD) | 21 | 2.8% |

Leading Causes of Death for American Indian Males, 1995-97

| | Number | % of A.I. Male Deaths |
|--------------------------|--------|-----------------------|
| ■ Heart Disease | 226 | 25.4% |
| ■ Cancer | 162 | 18.2% |
| ■ Unintentional Injuries | 117 | 13.2% |
| ■ Stroke | 52 | 5.8% |
| ■ Homicide | 46 | 5.2% |
| ■ Diabetes | 39 | 4.4% |
| ■ Lung disease (COPD) | 36 | 4.0% |

Comparison of Death Rates N.C. American Indians & Whites, 1995-97



Mortality

Nationally, the life expectancy for American Indians continues to be shorter than for the general population. Between 1992 and 1994, the life expectancy at birth for U.S. American Indians and Alaska Natives was 71.1 years, compared to 75.5 years for all races and 76.3 years for Whites alone.³

Within each age group, death rates from diet-related diseases such as heart disease, arteriosclerosis ("hardening of the arteries") and non-insulin-dependent diabetes mellitus are higher in American Indians than in Whites in North Carolina. Unintentional injuries are the leading cause of death for American Indian males ages 15 to 34; homicide is second. Although Indians in the state experience a lower overall level of cancer mortality than Whites, their rate of death from cervical cancer is higher.⁴

Chronic Disease

Over 8,000 hospitalizations occurred for American Indians in North Carolina in 1997. The top causes for hospitalization were pregnancy and childbirth, cardiovascular and circulatory diseases, respiratory diseases, diseases of the digestive system, and injuries and poisonings.

Although diabetes incidence data is not available for the population as a whole, a study of diabetes cases among the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians in 1988 found the age-adjusted prevalence of diabetes in that population to be four times the rate for the general U.S. population.⁵ The consequences of diabetes include limb amputations, degeneration of the retina (which can cause blindness), hypertension and arteriosclerosis, and kidney disease.

Asthma is a far greater health issue for American Indians than for Whites. The 1997 asthma hospitalization rate (for all ages) was 222.2 per 100,000 for American Indians, 2.5 times the White rate of 88.1.

Leading Causes of Hospitalization for American Indians in NC, 1997

| Percent of total A.I. Hospitalizations | |
|--|-----|
| ■ Pregnancy & Childbirth | 22% |
| ■ Cardiovascular/circulatory diseases | 18% |
| <i>(Heart Disease 14%, Stroke 2%)</i> | |
| ■ Respiratory Diseases | 12% |
| <i>(Pneumonia 4%, Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease 5%)</i> | |
| ■ Digestive System Diseases | 9% |
| ■ Injuries & Poisonings | 8% |
| ■ Genitourinary Diseases | 5% |
| ■ Cancer | 3% |
| ■ Infectious & Parasitic Diseases | 3% |
| <i>(Hospital discharge data exclude newborns and mental disorders)</i> | |